

## HEARING CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

### Noise

Noise is a physical hazard. Noise Induced Hearing Loss is totally preventable but cannot be reversed. Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) could be the result of a single episode of exposure to a very loud noise e.g. a gun blast going off beside the ear, or it could be the result of longer term exposure to lesser, but equally damaging over time, amounts of noise.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have issued guidance on the amount of noise likely to cause damage to hearing. Employers have a legal duty under the Noise at Work Regulations 2005 (HSE, 2005), which replace the Noise at Work Regulations 1989 (HSE, 1989), to act on this guidance and protect the hearing of their employees. Part of the legal requirement for employers is to provide adequate health surveillance for those workers exposed to levels of noise likely to cause harm to health.

The hearing assessments referred to in this paper form part of a statutory health surveillance programme. The hearing assessments involve the completion of a questionnaire covering hearing and relevant health history and a hearing test (audiometry).

Guidance on this statutory health surveillance programme advises audiometry is commenced at pre-employment for identified workers, repeated at one year and depending on the results, is carried out again within the next three years. If problems are identified, then it may be necessary to carry out audiometry more frequently. A hearing test is also recommended when the employee is leaving the post.

As part of the programme, the Occupational Health Service (OHS) works in partnership with the Safety Services Team and individual departments where noise poses a risk. Where necessary, managers will be advised to risk assess, control and monitor harmful effects of noise in order to protect its staff and prevent Noise Induced Hearing Loss

Noise Induced Hearing Loss is a prescribed disease, and is reportable under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (HSE, 1995), otherwise known as RIDDOR.

### The Hearing Conservation Programme

The University of Strathclyde's hearing conservation programme aims to control noise exposure and prevent occupational Noise Induced Hearing Loss. The programme complies with the duties under the Noise at Work Regulations, 2005. The programme consists of the following steps:-

- Noise assessment.
- Reduction of noise, either by reducing the noise levels using engineering controls, or by reducing an individual's exposure to noise through administrative controls such as job rotation.
- Protection of individuals:
  - Signposting of noisy areas
  - Training and education
  - Use of Personal Protective Equipment
  - Maintenance programmes
  - Audiometric testing

## **Audiometric Testing**

Audiometry audits the continuing effectiveness of the Hearing Conservation Programme. Its major role is a filter to identify individuals with hearing problems so that their medical condition can be more fully assessed and the risk of further damage due to noise can be reduced. Audiometric testing will:

- assist in detecting NIHL in those individuals where early damage has occurred;
- assist in detecting hearing loss at an early stage as it can often go unnoticed as NIHL can occur gradually;
- provide feedback on the effectiveness of hearing conservation methods;
- provide an opportunity for education of employees about the effects of noise and the importance of hearing conservation.

Audiometric testing will be performed in the Occupational Health Service by a nurse. Prior to the test, all individuals will have attended a training talk organised by their department and given the opportunity to ask any questions that might arise in relation to the Hearing Conservation Programme.

Testing takes approximately 20 minutes and results will be fed back to employees immediately after the test. The action required, if any, is determined by Health and Safety Executive Guidelines. If problems are identified, a copy will be sent, with the consent of the employee, to their General Practitioner to follow up and may be reviewed by the Occupational Health Physician. A copy of the results is given to the employee.

Results will be confidentially stored by the Occupational Health Service. Managers will be notified of attendance and will only be advised if any action needs to be taken.